



The President's Daily Brief

30 December 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hanoi's radio stations are broadcasting poorly again, but Gia Lam airport apparently is open to limited traffic. Additional areas of North Vietnam are being evacuated. (Page 1)

The Viet Cong's Madame Binh was treated to an extraordinary reception in Peking, where government leaders are still carefully modulating their criticisms of US policy in Vietnam. Meanwhile, Moscow continues to juggle support for Hanoi and a desire for detente. (Page 2)

South Vietnam's President Thieu has decreed stiff criteria for organized political activity in the hope of consolidating the non-Communist parties. (Page 3)

In Argentina, the Peronists are frittering away their chances to beat the government's candidate for the presidency. (Page 4)

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NORTH VIETNAM

The broadcast stability achieved during the past few days by Hanoi's radios has sharply deteriorated. The main domestic services are again experiencing frequent interruptions of transmissions, and Hanoi's international service has technical problems. Press agency [redacted] communications continue in disarray.

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On Wednesday, [redacted] a scheduled Chinese airliner made a successful landing at Gia Lam airport, apparently the first airliner to Hanoi since 18 December. Since then, the International Control Commission's aircraft has made a round trip to Hanoi, returning yesterday to Vientiane.

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Additional populated areas are being evacuated. On Christmas Day, according to an intercept, the executive committee of Bac Thai Province, north of Hanoi, issued orders for the evacuation of people from cities, towns, railroad stations, and storage areas. Supplies were to be removed from dumps and dispersed. Only citizens engaged in combat production or combat services were excluded from the order.

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CHINA-USSR-VIETNAM

The Viet Cong's Madame Binh has received an extraordinarily cordial reception in Peking, including a visit with Chairman Mao, who has been seeing only heads of state and government during the past year. The keynote speaker at a rally yesterday in honor of Madame Binh was Yeh Chien-ying, a member of the Politburo and a senior military commander. Yeh attacked US policy in Vietnam in language which has not been heard from Peking in some time. He focused his criticism on the bombing and US support for President Thieu, and blamed the impasse in Paris solely on Washington's "unreasonable demands."

Yeh's remarks edged Peking closer to the Vietnamese Communists on some key issues; he termed Hanoi's position at the Paris talks "a correct stand" and he implied support for Hanoi's position that a bombing halt north of the 20th parallel is a precondition for a resumption of the negotiations. On the other hand, Yeh expressed China's support for Vietnam only in general terms, and said nothing to indicate that a substantial increase in Chinese aid might be forthcoming.

Yeh made no reference to Sino-US relations. Chou En-lai, however, used the occasion of a public reception for Madame Binh to seek out Marilyn Berger of The Washington Post and to warn that the renewed bombing could adversely affect Sino-American relations.

We have not discerned in this any diminution of China's overriding desire for an early settlement of the war.

* * *

Moscow continues to juggle its need to support Hanoi with its desire to maintain the momentum of Soviet-US detente. Following a meeting on 29 December with North Vietnamese Politburo member Truong Chinh, Soviet party ideologist Suslov "demanded" an immediate end to the bombing and the signing of a peace agreement. He reiterated that the USSR is giving "and will go on giving all the necessary aid" until Vietnam's "just cause triumphs."

Suslov's rhetoric was a shade harsher than that used by Brezhnev in his anniversary speech last week, but he said nothing that has not been said many times before and even since the summit meeting last May.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Earlier this week President Thieu issued a new decree that contains stiff new criteria for political parties. The decree requires parties to have chapters comprising at least five percent of registered voters in at least half of South Vietnam's provinces and independent municipalities, and to win 20 percent of the vote cast in future upper house elections and 20 percent of the seats at stake in lower house elections.

Thieu apparently hopes he can consolidate the highly factionalized non-Communist camp in time to face a political struggle with the Communists. Some of his critics, however, will view the new measure as Thieu's device to increase his personal power by reducing competition against the nascent government-sponsored Democratic Party. Only a few of the country's 26 current legal parties could hope to meet the terms of the decree. Many small parties will be forced to go underground or to seek new alliances. Some might well decide to join the government camp.

South Vietnam's only strong opposition group, the An Quang Buddhists, will be unhappy with a provision requiring all candidates for national office to be backed by a legal party. The Buddhists have done well in recent elections for the Assembly, but they have no formal party of their own and have shown a reluctance to form one. In recent months, the Buddhists have muted their criticism of the government, and some have even indicated an interest in cooperating with Thieu. The Buddhists may protest the new measure, but they are unlikely to take a militant antigovernment stand because they still see the Communists as the greatest threat to their existence.

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ARGENTINA

Continuing bickering among the Peronists and their allies is improving the prospects of the Lanusse government's presidential candidate, retired air force General Ezequiel Martinez. Conflict among Peron's followers over the electoral slate appears to have been behind the attempted assassination of an important Peronist union official early this week.

With the approach of the deadline of 2 January for the formal filing of candidacies, President Lanusse has backed off from the idea of picking as Martinez' running mate Jorge Paladino, who has some following among moderate Peronists.

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Lanusse already is doing everything possible, including the use of government funds, to make sure that Martinez wins enough votes on 11 March to have a voice in the selection of candidates for the runoff that is necessary if no man wins a majority.

Even after the filing deadline passes, uncertainty over the lineup of top candidates will remain until the government-influenced courts rule on the legality of the Peronist Front's candidate, Hector Campora. We expect that Lanusse will see no major threat in the Campora candidacy and let it run its course.

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USSR-Somalia: The Soviets are supplying Somalia with four IL-28 jet bombers. The bombers, [redacted] will be the first such planes in the Somali Air Force. Their delivery, following a marked increase in Soviet shipments of other weapons during the past several months, is likely to aggravate relations with Ethiopia, a traditional enemy. The two states have been involved in an uneasy military standoff over a disputed border area for more than a month.

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Cyprus: Presidential elections will be held on 18 February. Archbishop Makarios is virtually assured of re-election to another five-year term, but the campaign could well result in renewed violence from General Grivas and his followers, who wish for union with Greece rather than continued independence. The vice-president will come from the Turkish Cypriot community; Ankara's candidate, Rauf Denktash, has a strong lead over incumbent Fazil Kuchuk.

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